

Dear friends,

Each year, it seems, I repeat a familiar pattern. As the season of Advent begins, I determine to resist celebrating Christmas before its time. For me, this is less about proper worship patterns and more about spiritual and emotional focus. I determine that, for as long as possible, I will not become busy with shopping, sending cards and decorating. Thankfully, my wife Sandy loves these activities! Some who are close to me call me Scrooge, a character from *The Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, and claim that my favorite words are “Bah humbug!”

Perhaps some of my determination comes from the reality that I love the season of Advent, with its powerful and prophetic themes. While we and the world can get busy with preparing for the celebration of Christmas and the remembrance of the birth of Jesus, I want to hold on to promises from Hebrew scriptures of a future world in which “the eyes of the blind shall be opened ...the ears of the deaf unstopped ...the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.” (Isaiah 35:5-6, NRSV)

From our own life experience, each of us can point to ways in which our world has not yet risen to the fullness of this promise. Signs of economic inequity are clearer at Christmas than at other times of the year, and many struggle to hold hope for their future. News reports are filled with conflict and violence, and we wonder when there will again be peace. The experience of suffering, loss, and grief during these past years of COVID has left some of us with too little joy. Strained and broken relationships lead to deep loneliness and a longing for love.

In times such as these, the miracle of Christmas has the power to transform us. God’s love for humanity is so great that God gave to our world the ultimate gift of love, a vulnerable child born in darkness and relative obscurity. A child whose birth was marked by the shining light of a star. A child whom we have come to know as God’s Word become flesh and as the light that no darkness can conquer.

The season of Advent helps us to remember a future for which we long. The good news of Christmas reminds us that God is with us as light in the darkness and as love in human flesh. May God’s light and love be with you this Christmas season, and may the hope, peace, joy, and love of God sustain you for life in a world that is not yet all that it will one day be.

Yours in Christ,

